

Message Text

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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5339

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IR LI LE PINS PINT PEPR
SUBJ: THE IMAM MUSA SADR IS MISSING

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE IMAM MUSA SADR IS MISSING, AFTER HAVING LEFT BEIRUT ON AUGUST 25 FOR LIBYA. THE IMAM IS NOTORIOUSLY CORRUPT EVEN BY LEBANESE STANDARDS. FEW PEOPLE WILL MOURN HIM, EVEN IF HE HAS DISAPPEARED PERMANENTLY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF LEBANON'S SHI'A COMMUNITY, THE IMAM MUSA SADR, IS MISSING. THE CABINET WILL HOLD AN EMERGENCY MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 14 TO DISCUSS HIS DISAPPEARANCE. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS, AS REPORTED IN THE LEBANESE PRESS.

A. ON AUGUST 25, SADR, ACCOMPANIED BY TWO MEMBERS OF THE HIGHER CONFIDENTIAL

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SHI'A COUNCIL, MOHAMMAD YAQUB AND ABBAS BADR-AD-DIN, LEFT BEIRUT FOR TRIPOLI, LIBYA, AT THE INVITATION OF THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT.

B. ON SEPTEMBER 9, THE SHI'A COUNCIL INFORMED PRIME MINISTER SALIM AL-HOSS THAT THE IMAM AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS WERE MISSING. THE SAME DAY THE PRIME MINISTER SUMMONED THE LIBYAN CHARGE D'AFFAIRS TO INQUIRE ABOUT THE IMAM'S WHEREABOUTS. AFTER CHECK-

ING WITH HIS GOVERNMENT, THE LIBYAN DIPLOMAT REPORTED BACK THAT THE IMAM AND HIS PARTY HAD LEFT TRIPOLI FOR ROME AUGUST 31 ON AN ALITALIA FLIGHT. AN NAHAR REPORTED, HOWEVER, THAT IT HAD CHECKED WITH THE HOTEL IN TRIPOLI WHERE THE IMAM HAD STAYED, AND THAT THE HOTEL HAD SAID THE IMAM HAD NOT CHECKED OUT UNTIL SEPTEMBER 3. IKE SAID THE IMAM INTENDED TO GO ON TO PARIS TO SPEND ID AL FITR WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN, WHO ARE NOW RESIDING IN THE FRENCH CAPITAL.

C. ON SEPTEMBER 12 PRESIDENT SARKIS CONTACTED LIBYAN LEADER MU'AMMAR QADHAFI TO ASK ABOUT THE IMAM. PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE INFORMATION OBTAINED SO FAR HAD BEEN "NEGATIVE." THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO SAID THAT AN OFFICIAL DELEGATION WOULD BE SENT TO LIBYA AND OTHER COUNTRIES TO SEARCH FOR THE IMAM. IKE SAID THE DELEGATION WOULD INCLUDE OMAR MUSAYKI, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, AS WELL AS LEBANESE ARMY AND POLICE OFFICERS.

3. COMMENT:

A. LEFTIST AS SAFIR HAS SAID THE IMAM'S DISAPPEARANCE IS LINKED WITH THE SITUATION IN IRAN, WHILE THE PHALANGIST VOICE OF LEBANON HAS CLAIMED THAT THE IMAM IS STILL IN LIBYA. BOTH THEORIES ARE PLAUSIBLE. THE IMAM IS NOTORIOUSLY CORRUPT, EVEN BY LEBANESE STANDARDS. IRAN HAS ACCUSED HIM OF EMBEZZLING FUNDS SENT TO LEBANON FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY. LIBYA
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HAS ALSO GIVEN THE IMAM MONEY AND MAY ALSO SUSPECT HIM OF EMBEZZLEMENT.

B. THE IMAM WAS BORN IN QUM, IRAN IN 1928, THE DESCENDENT OF A FAMILY OF SHI'A RELIGIOUS LEADERS. HE CAME TO LEBANON IN 1960, AND IN 1969 HE WAS ELECTED THE FIRST HEAD OF THE HIGHER SHI'A COUNCIL, WHICH REPRESENTS THE SHI'A COMMUNITY IN LEBANON. HE WAS RE-ELECTED TO THE POST IN 1975 DESPITE THE OPPOSITION OF HIS SHI'A RIVAL, PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER KAMEL AL ASSAD. DURING THE SAME YEAR THE IMAM FORMED THE "MOVEMENT OF THE DEPRIVED", OSTENSIBLY AIMED AT IMPROVING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY IN BAALBEK AND SOUTH LEBANON, BUT IN FACT PRIMARILY DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THE POLITICAL FORTUNES OF THE IMAM.

C. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE IMAM HAS AROUSED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST, BUT LITTLE CONCERN IN THE CAPITAL. HIS NOTORIOUS CORRUPTION HAS ALIENATED LEBANESE OF ALL FAITHS, INCLUDING THE SHI'A WHOM HE IS SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT. IF HE HAS DISAPPEARED PERMANENTLY, FEW PEOPLE WILL MOURN HIM.
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